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THEORIES AND BELIEFS

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In an essay entitled "The Scepticism of Believers," Leslie Stephen remarks a common confusion between *unbelief* and *contrary* belief. The term "belief" is at any historical moment almost invariably used to denote the established belief, that is, the belief supported by authority or by the consensus of opinion; while the term "unbelief" is used to denote dissent from the established belief, even when, as is most often the case, this dissent is itself due to belief. The established belief resists change, and must be attacked, weakened, or destroyed, before it is possible for another belief to get a hearing; hence assenters come to regard dissenters as destructive in their primary intent, and are blinded to the fact that there is another belief at stake, which may be as affirmative and constructive in its own terms as that which prevails. Thus modern religious orthodoxy has condemned as unbelief a certain secular tendency, which really has arisen, not from a love of mischief-making, but from a most devoted confidence in the uniformity of nature, and in the power of man to save himself. It is not wholly unjust to assert, as Leslie Stephen does assert, that, in opposing the free advance of science and of individualism, defenders of "the Faith" have virtually sought to prevent or destroy that faith in the enterprise of civilization which has mainly inspired the progress of the last two centuries.

But for our present purposes the significance of this lies not in the issue between warring beliefs, both of which are positive and confident, but in the issue between belief, which puts heart into men, and that state of suspended animation, of hesitation and general impotence, which is properly to be regarded as unbelief. "The man has most faith, in the sense in which faith represents a real force," says our author, "whose convictions are

such as are most favorable to energetic action, and is freest from the doubts which paralyze the will in the great moments of life. He must have a clear vision of an end to be achieved, devotion to which may be the ruling passion of his life and the focus to which all his energies may converge.”¹

In the present discussion, I use the phrase “established belief” to denote faith in this sense of *conviction favorable to action*; and it is my purpose to show that the opposite state of mind, unbelief, or the lack of convictions favorable to action, may be induced by *theory*. To avoid even a momentary misunderstanding, let me say at once that belief and theory are inseparable. Theory must necessarily have to do with the environment, and therefore cannot fail to be of practical significance. Theory is the ultimate source not only of knowledge, but of practical enlightenment and skill as well. Similarly, every belief is virtually a theoretical assertion, liable to correction or confirmation by science. Nevertheless, the difference between theory and belief is not only real, but of the greatest human importance. Before theory can become belief it must be assimilated to a plan of life; it must be not only asserted, but also adopted. And when belief becomes theory, it means that an integral component of some man’s plan of life is withdrawn; making it necessary that his hand should be stayed, and the plan suspended, if not permanently abandoned. Without a recognition of this radical difference between theory and belief, unless it be understood that as moods, states of mind, or moments of life, they are almost antithetical, one must remain blind to the real tragedy of heresy and doubt.

The virtue of belief lies in the application. Knowledge does not become belief until it is presupposed for the purposes of action. This holds equally of the most elementary common sense, of technical skill, and of religious piety. Common sense consists of the manifold things that can be *taken for granted* for the purposes of everyday life. Common sense must be true to be useful; but it would still not be useful unless it were habitually and implicitly trusted. Technical skill is derived from science; but until scientific principles are sufficiently well established to be relied on, they cannot be applied. And piety, if it

¹ Leslie Stephen, *An Agnostic’s Apology*, p. 50.

be not constant, if a life be not founded on it, is not that good thing which is called religion. He who makes plans for the morrow, or constructs a bridge, or prays to God, *believes*. There is, then, a *specific value in belief* over and above the value of truth which it must have in common with knowledge. This value is that confidence and steadiness, without which no consecutive endeavor is possible. And since this is the case, it follows that there is a legitimate and powerful incentive to belief, which may be distinguished from the love of truth. So that they are not wholly unreasonable who resent being robbed of their belief, or, seeking to have it restored, pray God to help their unbelief.

Now it is clear that theory can no more take the place of belief than a stone can take the place of bread. Theory does not directly nourish and sustain life, as belief does; because, unlike belief, it does not suit the humor of action. To theorize is to doubt. The investigator must be both incredulous and credulous, believing nothing, and prepared to believe anything. While he remains theoretically-minded, he remains open-minded, receptive to evidence, committing himself to assertions only tentatively or provisionally. He may be preparing foundations, but he cannot let them stand, and hence is not free to build on them. Furthermore, for the very reason that the theorist is not expected to put his theories into practice, he enjoys a certain irresponsibility. To him is allotted the task of examining a question on its merits, without reference to ulterior motives. He is permitted a certain play of conjecture, a certain oscillation of mind between hypothetical alternatives, that is fatal to administrative competence. Nor is the theoretical mind held to those standards of proportionateness which obtain in life. The scientist is not uncommonly likened to Professor James's "myopic ant," who tumbles into every microscopic crack and fissure, and never suspects that a centre exists. But fatal as such procedure would be to the proper conduct of life, it is neither unworthy nor unfruitful as an incident of theoretical analysis. Chesterton has remarked that "a man does not go mad because he builds a statue a mile high, but he may go mad by thinking it out in square inches."² In the latter case, judged by the standards of

² Chesterton, *Orthodoxy*, p. 67.

social efficiency, the man *is* mad; but his madness is explained, or adjudged not madness after all, when it is recognized that his interest is theoretical. And a similar allowance is made for a certain difference of pace in life and in theory. There is a maxim to the effect that "he that will believe only what he can fully comprehend, must have a very long head or a very short creed." In other words, when theoretically-minded, one proceeds as though life permitted of being invariably guided by good and manifest reasons; whereas practically, if one were to adopt such a principle, one would never reach the first milestone. Intelligent living proceeds not by doubting, examining, experimenting, and proving, but by assuming. There is an urgency and brevity about life that makes it impossible that one should give the rein to one's critical powers or weigh every affirmation in the delicate balance of logic.

I hope it is clear that I am not attempting to divide men into believers and theorists. I am distinguishing not between classes of men, but between characteristic moods or states of mind. The difference, however, is not so much psychological as it is moral. There is a different motive in theory and in belief, a different human good. Hence it follows that these moods may confront one another dramatically both in individual life and in the history of society. There is a party of theory and a party of belief, with a loyalty to each. It happens that in our own time there is more need of emphasizing the motive of belief. We live in a rationalistic age, many of us in a rationalistic fellowship or community, and incline to the party of theory. It is the mark of such partisanship to suppose that advocates of established belief are moved to suspect or resist innovation only by stubbornness or inertia. On the contrary, conservatism is not less passionate than radicalism, nor less moved by the love of good. For the advocate of established belief is the advocate of established life; of that present adjustment of interests which is daily tested and proved, and to which the great majority of men are wholly and irrevocably committed. It is less enlightened to despise him as the enemy of truth than to pay him some respect as the friend of peace and order.

Belief is a psychological and moral necessity, more indispen-

sable to life than hunger or sympathy. But we shall not understand the strength of this motive or the part which it plays in the vital economy until we recognize its *corporate* character. An established belief possesses a value proportional to the number of interests invested in it. And this solidarity of belief manifests itself on every scale, individual, social, and historical. It has been said that every man of action is a fatalist. This is due to the need of a permanence of belief, if the several acts of an individual life are to contribute to one end. A plan of action, in proportion to its scope, requires time and manifold agencies for its execution, and must be adhered to from moment to moment and from act to act. But every plan of action is based on innumerable assumptions concerning the natural and social environment; and if these assumptions be questioned, the plan is virtually suspended. Action is efficient in proportion to its range, and the greater its range the more necessary is it that its components should be rigid and stable. Assumptions must be trusted implicitly, in order that one may be free to leave them behind one's back and face the work to be done.

The larger the enterprise, the greater the need of a fixed orientation, of a view that shall not dissolve until a thousand tributary agencies have been assembled, coördinated, and made jointly and cumulatively to achieve the designated end. It follows that a steadiness of belief is more indispensable to social than to individual action. Every variety of coöperation requires that men shall occupy common ground. The best partners, like the best friends, are those who can take the most for granted. That which is true of every lesser social enterprise is supremely true of politics and religion. The arm of society is the institution, and this owes its power to a wide-spread community of belief. The institution is the most delicate and complicated mechanism of life, constructed out of the purposes and convictions of innumerable individuals. And this mechanism cannot remain intact, and be the instrument that it is designed to be, unless the parts be firm and durable. In short, society could not act, for the maintenance of order or the promotion of civilization, if men's ideas were fluent and transitory. This does not mean merely that social action would be hampered, but that any

political or organized community whatsoever would be impossible. Unbelief is equally fatal to the full benefit of religion. That benefit is realized only when a firm conviction concerning the ultimate source of human fortune, or the supreme object of devotion, dominates and unifies all the varied activities of life. This benefit is never fully attained; but so far as it has been attained, it has given to civilization something of the sweetness and vigor of health. When science and art, common sense and mystical ecstasy, the outer manner and the inner propensity, in all men different and yet in all alike, do but embroider and enact one theme, the circle is closed and the strength of man made perfect. And such unanimity of imagination and enthusiasm, quickening and ennobling the concert of action, must rest on unseen but deep-laid foundations of common belief.

There remains one further proof of the solidarity of belief. If society is to act effectively, it must remain in agreement with itself not only breadthwise but also lengthwise. The temporal continuity of civilization is the indispensable condition of progress. When fundamental convictions are altered, it is much like moving to a new planet; the work must be begun all over again. Apparently the conquests of civilization are gained by swift and sudden victories. But revolution is only the beginning of reformation. It is the slow process of reorganization and education that saves the fruits of such victories, and constitutes that steady if almost imperceptible advance on which the hope of civilization must mainly rely. In order that this shall be possible, it is necessary that beliefs should be transmitted together with problems and opportunities. Unless the burden is to fall, the young must not only grasp what the old have let go, but they must obtain the same foothold.

There are, then, *systems of belief* which condition effective, concerted, and progressive living. Such systems, it may be further remarked, have their more and their less vital parts. There are some beliefs which, like the keystone of the arch or the base of the pyramid, cannot be dislodged without overthrowing the whole structure. If there be a good in all belief, that good will be greater in such beliefs; and if there be a motive which rallies men to the support of any belief, men will be moved

most passionately when such beliefs are at stake. For these are the beliefs most built upon, to which men are most committed, and in which they have invested all their possessions. When they are shaken, it is like the trembling of the solid earth.

Unless, in spite of all prepossessions to the contrary, in spite of a justifiable impatience with every obstacle to progress, we can see a certain rightness and sound loyalty in conservatism, we shall remain blind to the meaning of the great transitional eras. Thus we are swift to condemn the Inquisition of the seventeenth century, and the compromises of Galileo and Descartes. The catholic orthodoxy of the time has been proved wrong, cruelly and fatuously wrong; and Galileo and Descartes lost an opportunity of displaying the heroism of Bruno and Spinoza. But a powerful motive of the drama will have been reduced to a nullity, if it be supposed that the Holy Office was prompted only by malice, or Galileo and Descartes by cowardice.

Galileo, it will be remembered, was convicted of holding that the earth moved. This doctrine was declared to be "absurd, heretical, contrary to the text of Scripture"; and Galileo was compelled to repudiate it. He defended himself on the ground that Scripture was not science. "Hence it appears," he said, "that when we have to do with natural effects brought under our eyes by the experience of our senses, or deduced from absolute demonstrations, these can in no wise be called in question on the strength of Scripture texts that are susceptible of a thousand different interpretations, for the words of Scripture are not so strictly limited in their significance as the phenomena of nature."³ But this defence left out of consideration what was referred to in the charge as the "absurdity" and "heretical" character of the new theory. It was not its contradiction of Scripture texts that made it dangerous, but its contradiction of the prevailing belief. This was definitely committed to the immobility of the earth, and in concluding that the Copernican theory, advocated by Galileo, was a menace to it, the Holy Office was not mistaken.

But why should the immobility of the earth be a cherished belief, to be protected by the penalty of death? Men are not

³ Quoted in Mézières, "Trial of Galileo," *Popular Science Monthly*, vol. x, p. 389.

soberly burned at the stake, or submitted to torment by due process of law, out of sheer bloodthirstiness, or on account of trivial offences. It must all appear childish and wanton unless we can learn to recognize the immense human importance which once attached to what is now regarded only as an obsolete astronomy. For it was not merely that men wondered how, if the sun did not move, Joshua could have commanded it to stand still; the Copernican theory contradicted the entire practical orientation that dominated the imagination and justified the plans of Christendom. Never in the history of European civilization has common sense been so comprehensive and so highly unified as it was in Galileo's day. That synopsis of heaven and earth which was the theme of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and the fundamental thesis of St. Thomas's *Summa Theologiae*, was not an esoteric truth, but an illumination shared by common men, and revealing to them the objects of their daily hopes and fears. The earth was the centre of a compact and finite created world. It was prepared by the hand of God for man's habitation, and surrounded by sun, moon, and stars for his convenience and delight. God himself dwelt at the periphery of the system, where he could observe and regulate the human drama enacted at the centre. Man's fall and redemption were the very theme of nature, the key to its interpretation; and the earth as the scene of these transactions was its true centre. Now let it be remembered that this image of nature was vividly present to the common mind, portrayed in every form of art, repeatedly implied in the postures of religious observance, and daily represented in common speech and gesture. And let it be remembered furthermore, that this was an age in which secular and religious beliefs were not sharply divorced; when what men believed in particular was subordinated to what they believed on the whole, and when, in spite of a growing worldliness, men could never wholly forget the saving of their souls. Is it any wonder, then, that men were shocked when they heard it said that the earth moved, that it was only the loose swinging satellite of a sun that was but one of many suns? When the Christian imagination has never in the centuries that have followed been able entirely to adapt itself to a decentralized and infinite cosmos, with its

limitless plurality of worlds, is it any wonder that a Christian of the early seventeenth century should have been unable to face such a hypothesis? For a dozen centuries Europeans had been growing accustomed to the world of the Biblical and Ptolemaic imagination; this was for all practical purposes now *their* world, in which they had built their home and laid their plans, and which was endeared to them by every tradition and association. Surely, whatever the Inquisition may have been guilty of, it was not tyranny; for it was the instrument with which this age thought to protect itself and every good thing which it owned.

When I bring myself to feel the force of these considerations, I am convinced that the tragedy of Galileo is not so simple as is sometimes supposed. Neither he nor his accusers could have enjoyed an undivided mind. As they were not the wicked enemies of truth, so he was not a reckless iconoclast forced to keep silence from fear of physical torture. For both must have felt the conflict between loyalty to the existing order and assent to theoretical truth. The difference lay rather in the relative strength of the two motives. The officers of the church were in a position of responsibility; Galileo, in the quiet and isolation of the Belvedere, could free his mind from the thought of social consequences, while dealing with "natural effects brought under our eyes by the experience of our senses."

After his first trial Galileo attempted to avoid the charge of disturbing the common belief by publishing his astronomical studies in the form of *Dialogues on the Two Great Systems of the Universe*. In these dialogues the merits of both systems are argued, with the result that, while the advocate of the traditional system is the nominal victor, the evidence for the Copernican system is actually more convincing to any one qualified to judge. This was undoubtedly an attempt to satisfy the general public by proclaiming in a loud voice, "The earth does not move," while at the same time whispering to his fellow-augurs, "but *we* know that it really does move." Galileo was by no means incapable of such a stroke, and it was their resentment at what they regarded as a bold trick that inspired Galileo's accusers with the bitterness which they manifested at his second trial.

But taken in the light of the real conflict of motives which Galileo must have felt, and in the light of the policy pursued by other men by no means so witty and adroit as he, may we not believe that these dialogues were in part conceived as a serious attempt to reconcile theory and belief? Galileo was not a revolutionist, but he was jealous of his scientific reputation. He wished to be true to the standards of exact research and at the same time avoid disturbing the public peace. And so he proposed to regard his scientific conclusions as "hypothetical," meaning that they were abstracted from belief. He thought that science might be permitted to go its own way, and freely entertain any idea that might recommend itself on purely theoretical grounds, provided that society could be protected from the premature attempt to put such ideas into practice. Society believes, the scientist affirms; they do so on different grounds, and with different values at stake. It would be wise, then, to separate the theoretical and believing processes. They cannot, it is true, be absolutely separated, nor would that be desirable even if it were possible; but they can be regarded as different functions of society and prevented from directly interfering with one another.

If I am mistaken in attributing such reflections as these to Galileo, there can at least be no doubt in the case of Descartes. The news of Galileo's conviction in 1633 reached Descartes just as he was in the act of publishing his *De Mundo*, in which he maintained the doctrine of the motion of the earth. Although, as Descartes himself afterwards affirmed, this doctrine was essential to his whole philosophy of nature, he at once abandoned the project. And when he returned to the topic in his *Principles of Philosophy* he had found a way to reconcile his theory with the accepted belief. He defined motion as "the transporting of one part of matter or of one body from the vicinity of those bodies that are in immediate contact with it, or which we regard as at rest, to the vicinity of other bodies."⁴ Now, according to the Cartesian theory of planetary motion, the planet is embedded in a fluid which sweeps vortex-fashion round the sun. It follows that, while the vortex does move, the planet, in this

⁴ Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, trans. by Veitch, p. 245.

case the earth, does not move, since it remains fixed in relation to the matter immediately adjacent to it.

Now why should Descartes attach importance to what we do not hesitate to call a quibble? Is it merely a proof of timidity and disingenuousness? Descartes was not, it is true, of the stuff of which martyrs are made; but he was nevertheless a man of more than average courage, and of eminent intellectual honesty. The explanation lies elsewhere. He did not pander to his age for purposes of private advantage; but he did sympathize with his age, and he did desire practically to identify himself with it. The motion of the earth meant to his age much what the abandonment of the institution of marriage or of the principles of democracy would mean to ours; it was a symbol of failure and of return to chaos. That Descartes was profoundly concerned at the conflict between theory and belief, between that intellectual freedom which was the condition of truth and that uniformity of sentiment which was the condition of social stability, is proved beyond doubt by the most personal of his writings, the famous *Discourse on Method*. There he concludes that just as when we propose to rebuild the house in which we live, we must nevertheless occupy some quarters while the work is going on, so it is necessary to believe practically, even when the theoretical judgment is suspended. Descartes proposes, therefore, to regulate his practice conformably to the opinions of those with whom he has to live. And since neither society nor the individual can make progress if they are forever examining the ground at their feet, he proposes for practical purposes to adhere steadfastly even to doubtful opinions once they are adopted; "imitating in this the example of travellers who, when they have lost their way in a forest, ought not to wander from side to side, far less remain in one place, but proceed constantly towards the same side in as straight a line as possible, . . . for in this way, if they do not exactly reach the point they desire, they will come at least in the end to some place that will probably be preferable to the middle of a forest."⁵

Galileo and Descartes were divided against themselves through feeling the weight of two great human motives, rationalism and

⁵ Descartes, *Discourse on Method*, trans. by Veitch, p. 25.

conservatism. Bruno, Campanella, Ramus, and Vanini, having identified themselves more uncompromisingly with the first of these motives, antagonized the second and were overwhelmed by it. The history of these six men testifies, not to the cruelty and duplicity of human nature, but to the almost unconquerable resistance of an idea which society has built into its foundations.

If established belief be an instance of conservatism, of that loyalty to a dominant system that springs from a large investment of interest, it follows that the right and necessity of a revolution of opinion is comparable to the right and necessity of political revolution. It cannot be denied, it is an indispensable condition of progress, but it is not lightly to be assumed. Revolution is always a doubtful expedient; and the justification of it comes only with the lapse of time. Some revolutionists, like Socrates, Bruno, and Rousseau, are the heroes of mankind, others are its petty mischief-makers.

It may be thought that established belief, like the ruling polity, is capable of taking care of itself. Without doubt there is a heavy inertia in belief, that saves it from being too easily overthrown. Not only are new ideas distrusted by those whose enterprises they threaten to discredit; but they have difficulty even in gaining access to the mind. They must always meet and overcome the charge of "absurdity" that bespeaks the settled habits of common sense. The author of the *Religio Medici* shows a charming indifference to the absurdities of his day. They are so remote from common sense that they may be tolerated without fear of any consequences for life. "Some," he says, "have held that Snow is black, that the earth moves, that the Soul is air, fire, water; but all this is Philosophy, and there is no delirium." In his *Hearts of Men*, Fielding tells us that "all men who have lived to a certain age have learnt that there are certain facts, certain experiences not at all connected with the supernatural, which they dare not tell of for fear of being put down as inventors. . . . Just as the old woman was ready to accept her travelled son's yarns of rivers of milk and islands of cheese; but when he deviated into the truth she stopped. 'Na, na!' she said, 'that the anchor fetched up one of Pharaoh's char-

iot wheels out of the Red Sea, I can believe; but that fish fly! Na, na! dinna come any o' your lies over yer mither.' ”⁶

But it is worthy of remark that common sense is not to be conjured with as it once was. We have grown first accustomed to absurdities, and then fond of them. I am not sure that in our day the burden of proof does not lie with the familiar fact. We expect to be surprised, and are suspicious of a theory that lacks novelty. This has doubtless always been the case with *les intellectuels*, but it is fast becoming a general state of mind. Many reasons may be offered for the change. First of all, it is due to the high conductivity of modern society. The state of one individual mind is transmitted with incredible rapidity to the entire community. The doubts, conjectures, and conclusions of theorists are promptly communicated to the public, which straightway itself strikes a theoretical attitude. Again, the general triumph of democratic principles has made a difference here. Intellectual exclusiveness does not suit the temper of liberal societies. It must be share and share alike with knowledge as with other commodities. The best is none too good for every man; hence there can be no living on the paternalistic bounty of a class of wise men. It was once thought that if the eyes of a few were opened, they might lead the rest; but now none consent to remain blind. And, finally, the humanitarian and utilitarian sentiment requires that all knowledge shall promptly be put to use. In order that men may be saved by it, or the conditions of life bettered, or mankind be brought a step forward, knowledge must be instantly worked into life and made to serve.

All these and other tendencies of the day conspire to produce an impatience and over-haste in belief. We suffer from a new kind of credulity. It was once complained that men are too easily inclined to believe what their fathers believed, that men lack originality and independence. But there is now reason to fear that men may too easily believe what no one has ever believed before. Men with settled convictions may become as rare as men with ancestry and traditions. And the consequences must be scarcely less detrimental to social welfare than the conse-

⁶ H. Fielding, *Hearts of Men*, pp. 274-275.

quences of complacency and narrow-mindedness. For that inquisitiveness and fluidity of mind which is the condition of the discovery of new truth, is intolerable in society at large. Theory must correct and enlighten belief, but it cannot, consistently with the conduct of any considerable enterprise, replace belief.

I cannot hope to offer any general solution of what appears to be a recurrent and inevitable problem. It is of the very essence of life that it should be both conserved and changed. To belief society owes its cohesiveness and stability; to theory it owes its chance of betterment. And since every human motive is liable to exaggeration, society will always suffer harm on the one hand from complacency, and on the other hand from reckless innovation. Conflict between the mood of theory and the mood of belief, or between the party of theory and the party of belief, will doubtless remain to the end a source of confusion and waste. And this conflict will be most bitter where the most is at stake; respecting those ideas, namely, in which society is most deeply involved. But I think that we are justified in drawing certain inferences that are not wholly insignificant. In the first place, since there is a virtue in belief that has no equivalent in theory, it is wise to surrender belief reluctantly. A due recognition of the gravity of such a crisis permits no other course. Some degree of stolidity and inertia is a mark of moral poise. Nor is this incompatible with intellectual alertness and curiosity. It requires only that one shall acquire reserve, and refuse to admit strange theories at once to the circle of one's dear convictions. Similarly, conservatism in social action is not incompatible with the liveliest and most serious speculation concerning human institutions; but if this is to be possible, society must act more slowly than the curious-minded speculate, and insist that ideas be long tested, and gradually absorbed.

There is also a certain obligation in this matter that rests with theorists, and more especially with those who are devoted to the examination of the most fundamental ideas. It happens, doubtless because these ideas have not as yet permitted of exact treatment, that there is here the least barrier between theory and belief. Political, social, and philosophical theory speak the language of common sense, using terms that signify the objects of

daily life. It is as though the anthropologist were to allude to his personal friends. But there can never be any exact correspondence between the objects of theory and the objects of belief, because they are defined by different contexts, and belong to different systems. All the more reason, then, why different terms should be employed, and the layman be spared the needless fear that his bread or soul's salvation hangs on the fortunes of an argument.

What I have said applies with peculiar force to the philosopher. No one else debates such grave issues; nor is there any other region of theoretical inquiry in which differences and fluctuations of opinion are so marked. And I refer here not especially to those who proclaim themselves metaphysicians, but to all theoretically minded persons, including scientists and moralists, who busy themselves with ultimate questions. It would seem to follow that society is in special need of avoiding a hasty assimilation of such theory. And yet the terms which it employs are terms which symbolize to mankind their most trusted and cherished objects of belief. No one has taken the name of the Lord his God in vain so frequently and unconcernedly as the philosopher. While philosophers dispute, believers witness with dismay the apparent dissolution not only of God, but of immortality, freedom, marriage, and democracy as well. I wish that philosophy, for theoretical purposes, might speak a language of its own, and settle its disputes in a vernacular that does not arrest the attention of the community. If this were possible, philosophy would be better entitled to the full benefit of that immunity from direct social responsibility which is most conducive to clear seeing and straight thinking. And society could afford to wait for the application of a more refined and better-tested truth.

No theorist is under obligation immediately to give society the benefit of his theorizing. It was said of Samuel Clarke, who sought to overthrow atheism by scientific argument, that no one had really doubted the existence of God until he undertook to prove it. There will always be an absolute difference between rational assent on theoretical grounds, and implicit belief. The theoretical mood, even when a conclusion is reached, is a state of practical doubt. When the transition is made from believing

to theorizing, the loss is certain; and he who lightly encourages such a transition is guilty of recklessness and irresponsibility. It is a grave matter to substitute one's own theory, however well-reasoned, for another man's belief. For the belief is a part of the believer's life, a condition of the confidence and hopefulness of his action. It is a mistaken idea that honesty compels every theorist to be a propagandist; it is true, rather, that in the great majority of instances humanity, and a serious regard for the well-being of society, require that he shall not.

The task of mediating between theory and life is perhaps the most delicate and responsible task which it falls to the lot of any man to perform. And it cannot be denied that the theoretical habit of mind tends to disqualify one for undertaking it. For the investigator is trained to neglect every consideration but such present evidence as he can obtain. The human probability that his conclusions may some day, perhaps tomorrow, be over-ruled by new evidence, he properly excludes from his consideration. It is not relevant to his problem. But while theories may be changed with little cost and with certain gain, this is not true of beliefs. Here the cost is more certain than the gain. And the very consideration which the theorist is trained to neglect, and must neglect if his mind is to be free, is here of paramount importance. He who is to advise men must be the friend of men. He must understand their hopes and share their responsibilities. Hence he must regard every idea with reference to its effect on that present, concrete, human state of mind, from which all social action must proceed. No one has proclaimed more eloquently than Francis Bacon that it is to knowledge that man owes his triumph over nature and his advancement in all noble arts. But he would willingly, I think, have said of established belief, what he said of antiquity, that it "*deserveth that reverence, that men should make a stand thereupon* and discover what is the best way; but when the discovery is well taken, then to make progression."